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provement through foreign influences. Its destruction closed, by a dramatic episode, the long duel between Madame de Staël and Napoleon, with the apparent victory of the latter.

Eighty years afterwards we look back upon his empire as a thing wholly passed, while the book remains a lasting power. "There are only two things in the world," said the Emperor, "the sword and the mind. By the mind I mean the spirit of religious and civil institutions. . . . In time the sword is always beaten by the mind." *

(To be continued.)

* Lady Blennerhasset, "Madame de Staël," vol. iii. p. 327.

A POINT OF SCHOOL HYGIENE.

BY JOHN JACKSON, F.E.I.S.

THE subject of postures in schools is one of such grave moment that it is advisable to draw the attention of parents to the question, which for several years now has engaged the powers of medical experts and teachers both in this and other countries. So many of our children, more particularly the weakly and delicate ones, emerged from school life with spines permanently or otherwise deformed, and with eyesight seriously injured, that both parents and teachers, but more especially surgeons and oculists, were roused, and not only roused but alarmed, so that investigations were at once instituted, which investigations have finally culminated in the latest pronouncement by the recent International Congress of Hygiene, held last August in London. I would here, in a *précis* of the paper which I had the honour of reading before the Congress, appeal to all readers of the *Parents' Review* on a matter which vitally concerns the rising generation, both as to their bodily health and their worldly prospects. The question of postures has naturally an almost exclusive reference to the positions assumed and taught in the writing class. So much work in school is done with the pen and pencil (sometimes as much as half or three-fifths) that the attitude which is maintained during these exercises becomes a potent force in the physical development of the children, and it is in connection with this branch of a school curriculum that the present paper has to do—"The Relation of Handwriting to Hygiene."

The ever-increasing employment and importance of handwriting is a cause of continual surprise. There is no occupation of life above the merely manual tasks of day-labourers into which writing does not enter. We cannot exaggerate its importance, notably in the departments of law, commerce, civil service, science, and individual as well as international correspondence. Strange to say, we find on inquiry, that the development of

writing as an art—during the last two hundred years or so—has been governed and directed by purely capricious and fanciful theories. Caligraphy has not been studied with reference to the writer, but on absolutely independent grounds. To give a typical example, all writing was originally, and down to a comparatively modern date, vertical; but the fashion of a sloping and semi-illegible hand was introduced for reasons actually absurd in themselves; a mere sentimental and vitiated taste suggested the change, since the sloping writing favoured the style of ornamental flourishing which was the rage at that time, whilst the upright, by its very nature, discountenanced and deprecated any attempts at useless and ornate embellishments. Indeed it is only within the past few years that any physiological requirements have been recognised, and even now hardly one teacher in fifty would admit any connection between hygiene and handwriting, so defective is education on this matter. That physiological and hygienic principles should be an integral part of any system of penmanship goes without saying; but it is still more remarkable that when the subject of school postures first occupied the attention of the medical faculty, the real root of the malady was never, for one moment, suspected.

Investigators informed us that it was the instruction which was inferior—want of proper supervision and correct teaching. This explanation proving unsatisfactory, the "light" was attacked, and a canon law was established both for sufficient and properly directed light. Still no signs of improvement so far as the maladies were concerned. A further flood of light then seemed to burst upon the experimentalists, and the evil was unearthed. Ill-constructed desks and seats were of course the sole origin of all the mischief, and we had a furore of hygienic and adjustable desks and forms. The old, cumbrous, and killing instruments of torture have disappeared and made way for excellently constructed desks of a truly scientific and hygienic kind. So far the inquiry has done good in all respects. The teachers received a stimulus from the reflections cast upon them; school buildings have been modified and built upon sound principles with regard to the disposal of light and the arrangements of windows; and, school furniture for the accommodation of writers has been brought to a point of excellence bordering on absolute perfection. Still the children sat upon the new benches approved by the faculty *just as badly as upon the old*.

Last of all the position of the book was assailed. Medical experts were at a loss to account for the crooked postures, and thought possibly an oblique position of the book might avert the twisting position of the writer. Alas! no! Fortunately, however, there was one delinquent still remaining upon which in despair the attention of the inquirers was directed, when suddenly the whole enigma was solved and the culprit was discovered.

The slant or slope of the writing itself necessitated all this twist, contortion and pain. Once the secret was actually revealed there was a spontaneous and unanimous deliverance. Experiments on a large scale have been made, evidence of a most voluminous and unmistakable character given, and the concurrent testimony of medical and educational specialists states that sloping writing demands the side or twisted position (as one authority on handwriting prescribes it, a position of 45° to the desk) of the body, a corresponding twist of the neck, distortion of the spine, displacement of the right shoulder, a deflection at the wrist, compression of the chest, and a very unequal action of the eyes. No wonder the writing of the age is so miserably illegible when it has to be practised under such cruel conditions and disqualifying abnormalities.

And our teachers are still in a lamentably quiescent and indifferent state. Notwithstanding that men of the highest eminence in their profession declare and repeat in the most emphatic and dogmatic language that "the postures of young people assumed in the sloping writing are one of the chief factors in the production of spinal curvature;" that these postures of sloping writers are "without doubt recognisable as one of the most frequent causes of crooked growth;" that the sloping writing is "a prolific cause of shortsight;" the great mass of teachers remain entirely oblivious, and continue their suicidal and pernicious practices with the oblique penmanship, apparently indifferent to the irreparable damage they are inflicting upon the juveniles committed to their care. Amongst those who have distinguished themselves in the investigation, mention may be made of Professors and Drs. Barnard, Cohn, Coindet, Kotelmann, Lorenz, Reuss, Smith, Scharff, and Schubert.

Vertical writing must resume its ancient sway. Its claims are irresistible.

The gentlemen named above concur in declaring that the absolute superiority of this method of writing over all other

methods must be recognised; that it is much to be preferred to oblique writing, and that it strictly fulfils all hygienic requirements. Vertical (or as our continental brethren call it, steep) writing demands only one position, and that "the normal." Instead of the side posture we have the square or straight posture, securing an identity or parallelism of the facial and chest planes, no twist of the neck or the wrist, no compression of the chest, and no unequal strain upon the eyes. The writer sits evenly and straight before his desk, with both arms leaning equally thereon, the eye looks directly down upon its task, the hand, wrist and arm are in the best and easiest position for a running handwriting, the body is not in the least distressed by any artificial posing, the spine is normal, the chest is unrestrained by undue leaning forward, and the work of writing is proceeded with under conditions of hygiene and ease, the most favourable and perfect possible.

But the hygienic superiority is also seen in the educational advantages which vertical writing possesses.

Being obviously as well as demonstrably much more legible than sloping writing, "ease in reading" is another most valuable element in the discussion. The strain so frequently put upon the eyes by the undecipherable sloping scribble that, according to independent and competent authorities, constitutes the great majority, the largest proportion of our entire correspondence is sufficiently serious of itself to call for drastic measures and an immediate remedy. Vertical writing in reducing illegibility to a minimum, proves itself indefinitely superior from the hygienic standpoint. I would refer my readers to a pamphlet entitled, "Upright *versus* Sloping Writing," in which the respective merits of the two styles are exhaustively set forth with diagrams in illustration of the text.

Once again, if we contemplate the ease in both *teaching*, *acquiring*, and *writing* the vertical style, its hygienic advantages and immense superiority are clearly apparent. In these respects it has, in every possible way, relation and test, justified its claims to the highest hygienic principles. Parents should investigate the interesting question for themselves. A couple of evenings' quiet reading will supply all the arguments and facts necessary for a complete apprehension of the whole matter.

So far as the evidence from teachers has been collected and

collated, there is but one issue undisturbed by a single dissentient. Briefly summarised, it shows that wherever introduced, *vertical writing* (A) enkindles a greater interest in the art both with teachers and pupils; (B) entails much less labour in teaching; (C) greatly increases the rate of progress; (D) develops a much greater command of the pen; (E) secures a much higher standard of excellence; (F) increases materially the speed of the writer; (G) avoids every undesirable and injurious posture; and (H) entirely averts all and any of the unhealthy and deplorable consequences resulting from the practice of sloping or oblique penmanship. Surely the eyes of our teachers will speedily be opened to their true position and interests in this controversy. If medical evidence, if theoretic demonstration, if practical proof, separately and collectively, fail to convince the sceptical and indifferent amongst the ranks of our teaching profession, I would appeal to parents and say, let your voices be heard. You are deeply affected for good or evil in this question. Claim to have a vote in the movement, demand for your children that they be given safe and sound and healthy instruction; not that they be made the unfortunate victims, on the one hand, of a style or system as contrary to, as it is inimical to health, and, on the other, to a prejudice or unconcern as dishonourable in the teacher as it is dishonest to his charge. It may encourage our parents to learn that the movement is progressing on the Continent with wonderful rapidity.

The Supreme Council of Health in Vienna has declared emphatically in favour of upright penmanship. At Lubeck, a resolution in its favour has been passed by the large association of teachers there.

The Bavarian Government introduced the style into some of its schools in 1888, and the system is being widely adopted in the schools of Berlin, Leipsic, Hamburg, Frankfort, Hanover, Karlsruhe and other cities.

In Flensburg the steep writing was adopted (1888) and now about three-fourths of the pupils in that city write vertically (Dr. Scharff, October 22, 1891).

The Imperial Government in Alsace has authorised and advocated the style, and the Norwegian Government are having a report prepared on the question; so that whilst the leading Educational Governments and bodies on the Continent are agitating the question, we at home, both teachers and Govern-

ment (saving an enterprise by the writer, started about 1886) are utterly oblivious to the danger and to our duty alike.

When the highest, when the supreme and only authorities have finally, explicitly and categorically declared by unanimous resolution, "That the hygienic advantages of vertical writing have been clearly demonstrated, and established both by medical investigation and practical experiment;" and that "it is hereby recommended that upright penmanship be introduced and generally taught in our elementary and secondary schools," surely it is time for us all to join the crusade and enlist our powers in the promotion of that system of handwriting which is at once easiest to read, write, learn and teach, and which in every aspect possesses a monopoly of merit and advantages, hygienic, educational and practical.

The full text of the paper and resolution, together with the report *in extenso* by the Commission of Medical Experts to the Imperial and Royal Supreme Council of Hygiene, Vienna 1891, can be had on application to Messrs. Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd., St. Dunstan's House, Fetter Lane, London, E.C.

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR.

THOSE HOLY FIELDS:*

BEING SUNDAY EVENING THOUGHTS FOR OUR CHILDREN
CONCERNING

"Those holy fields,
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet
Which eighteen hundred years ago were nailed,
For our advantage, to the bitter cross."

BY THE REV. C. H. CHASE.

I.

THE OLD MOSQUE.

"Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom."
Psalm cxlv. 13.

AFTER a long weary drive of seventy miles, what is this beautiful city which bursts upon us surrounded with orchards? This is Damascus. Here is the River Abana, yonder to the south is Pharpar, and over there is snowy Hermon. We are just entering one of the oldest cities in the world. You remember Abraham's faithful steward once lived here. What is that long building with those minarets, like little church spires? That is a Moslem mosque. The Moslems, or Mohammedans, do not believe in our dear Lord Jesus as God the Saviour. Their little girls are very ignorant, and hardly ever go to school, and when they go out in the streets their faces are all covered, so that no

* Having had the great happiness of a ride through the Holy Land, I write these short papers with the hope that they may make some dear children happier on Sunday evenings, and help them to picture more perfectly the scenes of Holy Scripture.